

Israel's Extrajudicial Assassinations: Alternative Reading of the Al-Mabhouh Murder

By [Ramzy Baroud](#)

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The killing of Palestinian activist Mahmoud al-Mabhouh on January 19, 2010 was clearly a well-planned, violent and sadistic act, committed by Israeli assassins in the supposed safety of a sovereign country.

Yes, Mahmoud al-Mabhouh was a Palestinian activist. We have no reason to believe otherwise. He spent years of his life in Israeli prison – and one year in an Egyptian jail – for his political activism. This, however, gives no credibility to Israel's accusation that al-Mabhouh was a killer of Israelis. This assertion becomes even more problematic when considering that al-Mabhouh's assassination was, according to British media, ordered by accused Israeli war criminals and rightwing politicians.

According to the Sunday Times, Meir Dagan, the current director of Mossad briefed Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on the assassination plan during a meeting in early January. "The people of Israel trust you. Good luck," Netanyahu reportedly said at the end of this meeting.

It is disgraceful enough that the assassins used 'fraudulent' European passports, as well as credit cards linked to an American bank to carry out their plans. But more upsetting is the fact that this cruel and calculated action has inspired little more than expressions of 'outrage'. Have we become this resigned to Israeli impunity?

What about the sanctity of life, the sovereignty of nations and the respect for international law? Are these immediately disposable when the victim is Palestinian and the location of the crime an Arab country?

Al-Mabhouh has also been callously deprived of his own relevance to the story. We don't really know much about the man aside from what Israeli wants us to know – a senior Hamas operative who was responsible for the abduction and killings of two Israeli soldiers; one of the founders of the militant arm of Hamas, Izz al-Din al-Qassam; the middleman between Hamas in Gaza and al-Quds Force of the Revolutionary Guard in Iran.

Who has weaved this fascinatingly reductionist account of al-Mabhouh's life in such a short span of time? His family? Hamas? The Palestinian media? No, none of these. The creator of this biography is Israel, the very country that assassinated him. Now that is truly outrageous: the murderer writes and convinces the world of the story of the murder victim. And the media gladly runs with it.

Expectedly, a Palestinian would tell al-Mabhouh's story in entirely different terms. He was

born in Jabalia, one of Gaza's poorest and most crowded refugee camps. These key words alone – Gaza, poor, crowded, refugee – helps to unravel the real story of al-Mabhouh. It is the story shared by so many people who still live a life of utter anguish, poverty and resistance in the Gaza Strip – and elsewhere – which is under inhumane siege and successive wars by the world's fourth strongest army. The story is not about abducted occupation soldiers, but about millions of refugees, not about Iran, but about Gaza and Palestine, not about luxury hotels, but about horrifyingly desolate refugee camps.

But Palestinians – like many oppressed peoples around the world – have no right to their own narrative. Their story is negligible, if not wholly irrelevant. Israel commits the murder, Israel offers the explanation, and eventually Israel gets away with both the crime and the lie. Al-Mabhouh's murder might eventually inspire several documentaries that highlight the murderous nature of Palestinian militants, and the unequalled brilliance of Israeli retaliation. Another Steven Spielberg's Munich might already be in the making. The first scene of this would not be al-Mabhouh's family forced to flee their village in Palestine after untold butchery by Zionist militants in 1948. Instead it might show a dark-skinned, menacing Palestinian slaughtering two helpless Israeli soldiers pleading for their lives.

We are, more or less, told to forget about al-Mabhouh. After all, his name is used along with Hamas and Iran in the same sentence. That should be enough to tell us that his life is dispensable – just like the lives of over 1,400 Palestinians who were killed by the Israeli army in Gaza between December 2008 and January 2009. Israel may well be preparing for yet another attack on the impoverished Strip. The tunnels that represent the lifeline for the vast majority of Palestinians in Gaza are being routinely blown up by Israeli warplanes, detonated by dynamites and blocked by an Egyptian steel wall. Gazans cannot be allowed any weapons to defend themselves either. The 'international community' has held many meetings to ensure that no weapons find their way to Gaza. The US in particular is utterly firm regarding this issue – although not at all firm about ensuring that food or medicine reach the Strip. Al-Mabhouh may have been killed due to Israel's belief he was arming the resistance. This partly explains why the 'international community' is not at all moved by the murder. Al-Mabhouh might have been involved in breaking the Western consensus on denying Gaza both food and arms.

The EU is only worried about its link to the story, and not the murder itself. An EU statement issued in Brussels on February 22 condemned the "fact that those involved in this action used fraudulent EU member-states passports." They didn't name Israel though. As the Financial Times resolved, "criticism of Israel was as strongly worded as the EU could manage, given that Germany, Italy and several other countries place great emphasis on close relations with Israel."

One can only imagine what would happen if Hamas decides to strike back, expanding the battleground from Gaza to the rest of the world. Would the EU express disapproval of Hamas' use of fraudulent passport, but then refrain from actually naming the group – due to a fear, say, of upsetting Muslim countries?

No. But when the victim is a Palestinian and the murderers are Israelis – 27 of them so far – it's an entirely different story, and an entirely different concept of justice.

Ramzy Baroud (www.ramzybaroud.net) is an internationally-syndicated columnist and the editor of PalestineChronicle.com. His latest book is "My Father Was a Freedom Fighter: Gaza's Untold Story" (Pluto Press, London), now available on Amazon.com.

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